



CITY COUNCIL
JOHN J. KENNEDY
COUNCILMEMBER
DISTRICT 3

17 June 2020

Dr. Thomas F. Rosenbaum
Office of the President
California Institute of Technology
Parsons-Gates, Mail-Code 204-31
Pasadena, California 91125-3100

Dear President Rosenbaum,

I write today as a lifelong resident of the City of Pasadena, former President of the Pasadena Chapter of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, former vice mayor, current Pasadena City Council Member and Chair of its Standing Committee on Public Safety.

As we work together in these difficult times of COVID-19, an economic crisis, and the flames of a quest for justice sparked by the horrific murder of George Floyd, I am respectfully asking for your assistance.

Reconciliation and healing require the relentless pursuit of truth, justice and remembering events that some believe are best forgotten. The pursuit of Otto Adolph Eichmann and Joseph Mengele to bring them to justice, one which succeeded and one which did not, are two examples of this and the reasons for not letting the past be forgotten.

My specific ask is to be granted access to the archives of the Human Betterment Foundation and of Ezra Gosney in the Special Collections Library at Caltech. Ezra Gosney was an American philanthropist and eugenicist. In 1928, he founded the Human Betterment Foundation, the purpose of which was "race betterment" through eugenic sterilization, specifically, the compulsory sterilization of the mentally ill, the developmentally disabled and negroes.

Gosney's work was based upon California's compulsory sterilization laws and published in 1929 to promote compulsory sterilization laws in other states and countries. It is my understanding that Gosney's book was specifically referenced by officials in Nazi Germany in the creation of their own sterilization legislation in 1933 as having provided proof that sterilization programs could be safe and effective.

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The Sacramento philanthropist/eugenicist Charles Goethe wrote to Gosney in 1934, “[y]ou will be interested to know that your work has played a powerful part in shaping the opinions of the group of intellectuals who are behind Hitler in this epoch-making program. * * * you have really jolted into action a great government of 60 million people.”

This was of course, the same time and same set of intellectuals in Germany which was jolted into action to enact the Nuremberg Laws, also known as the Law for the Protection of German Blood and German Honor and the Reich’s Citizenship law. These laws, of course, laid the groundwork for the removal of Jews, Gypsies, and gays and others from German society and for the Shoah.

To my knowledge, these archives have never been explored with an eye to viewing the extent to which California law of that shameful time period provided inspiration and support for genocide. I would like to have access to the archives of the Human Betterment Foundation and Gosney Collection to explore these connections in the interest of discovery, disclosure, reconciliation and healing, and in the spirit of “Never Forget.”

You are a respected leader in United States and especially in Pasadena. Under your leadership Civil Rights hero, Congressman John Lewis, served as the commencement speaker at Caltech. Under the presidency of David Baltimore, The Archbishop of the Anglican Church of South African, The Most Reverend Desmond Mpilo Tutu, was hosted by the Caltech-Y to speak truth to power from the preeminent grounds of the California Institute of Technology.

My father was the chauffeur and bodyguard for Dr. Theodore Von Karman, founder of the Jet Propulsion Laboratory. Von Karman was one of the most brilliant minds in the world, a Hungarian Jew, who was a leading professor at Caltech. Additionally, one summer while attending the University of Southern California, I was a guard at JPL.

The souls of our ancestors cry out for the telling of their truth and story. I hope you hear their voices. I look forward to hearing from you at your earliest opportunity. Thank you.

Respectfully yours,



John J. Kennedy

cc: The Honorable Terry Tornek, Mayor
City of Pasadena